

Wild Turkey Advisory Committee
May 25, 2017

Attendance:

Kevin Morgan – DNR WM
Carrie Milestone – DNR WM
Brian Dhuey – DNR WM
Jim Holzwart – DNR WM
Rick Horton – NWTF
Dean Edlin – DNR NHC
Tom Isaac – DNR WM
Arlyn Splitt – WCC
Ralph Fritsch – WWF
Dan Eklund – USFS CNNF
Sean Neverman – DNR LE
Mark Witecha – DNR WM
Jaqi Christopher – DNR WM

Spring Hearing Results

DNR Questions

- 1) Consistent last day of season for archery deer, pheasant, turkey and fisher
 - a. Passed 3152 votes to 1171
- 2) Eliminate Fall Drawing
 - a. Passed 3052 votes to 1141
 - b. Soonest it will be implemented is fall of 2018
- 3) Wild Turkey as Wisconsin's Game Bird
 - a. Passed 2492 votes to 1316

Citizen Resolutions

- 1) Create landowner preference for over the counter turkey permit sales – Iowa County
 - a. Passed 48 votes to 21
- 2) Change definition of landowner from 50ac to 5ac – Vernon County
 - a. Passed 50 votes to 9
 - b. Committee's Concerns:
 - i. Legislatively, landowner are only awarded up to 30% of the tags in each zone, so this resolution would be increasing the amount of landowners eligible, overall decreasing the likelihood of drawing a tag.
- 3) Allow Landowners to use tag during any time period on their own land – Vernon County
 - a. Passed 43 votes to 16
 - b. Committee's Concerns:
 - i. Would shut down opportunity for other hunters to use landowner's land

- ii. Hard to administer, impossible to enforce
 - iii. Landowners should not be given any more preferences than they already have
- 4) Change start and end date of the spring season to a Saturday-Friday or Monday-Sunday schedule – Barron County
 - a. Passed 31 votes to 5
 - b. Committee's Concerns:
 - i. Starting on Saturday would increase the hunting pressure on the opening day of each time period, which could cause overcrowding and lead to more accidents.
 - ii. Turkey hunter surveys show Wednesday start dates spreads out hunting pressure during the time period.
 - iii. Starting on Wednesday is based off of the old season structure where time periods were only 5 days long from Wednesday to Sunday – it was not created for a biological purpose.
- 5) Eliminate Spring drawing and sell all permits over the counter – Walworth County
 - a. Passed 47 votes to 40
 - b. Committee's Concerns:
 - i. Customers will have to take off work; OTC tags cost \$10 where an application costs \$3; this would eliminate the preference system.

The Wild Turkey Advisory Committee does not take a stance on resolutions until they pass through the Conservation Congress. The congress meets in August. The citizen resolutions that pass in the congress go to next year's spring hearing to be voted on by the public.

Create an informational document: Many of the citizen resolutions seem to stem from a misunderstanding of the season structure. Rick is willing to create a draft publication explaining frequently asked questions that may help educate hunters on season structure. The document could be an Outdoor News article, or another type of publication. The document can include:

- Why the Wednesday start date
- Why the season starts the 3rd week in April
- General season structure
- Zone structure
- Difference between the turkey population in the northern zones and southern zones
- How weather affects turkey populations

Internal Stamp Project Review

Committee's comments on the internal DNR projects awarded through district allocation:

- The committee would like to see the projects that were not funded as well as those funded
- The district allocation system went smoothly for county staff
- Many of the projects were funded based on DNR habitat priorities

- There is a concern that there are too many barrens management projects that are not specific to turkey management
- Several grassland projects were funded in the south, something the committee has scrutinized in the past
- One equipment project was approved in the whole state (northern district)

Northern District Allocation Process: The district supervisor and area supervisors went over each project proposal and were very selective in the projects they funded. Overall the north got less turkey money this year than in the past when the committee was picking projects.

External Project Proposals

There are 10 projects to review, much fewer than in the past. Committee now has to think of projects in terms of “What projects do we not *want* to fund?”

The committee would like a more standardized scoring system – like in past years

Funding Available

- Cooperative Habitat Projects: \$95,000
- Information Education Projects: \$54,000
- Research Projects: \$68,000

Funding Results:

- All Cooperative Habitat projects were fully funded
 - COOP2 and COOP3 were considered for partial funding, but it was decided to use unspent research funds.
- All Information and Education projects were fully funded, with funding left over
- No Research projects were funded

Left-over Funding

- Cooperative Habitat Projects: \$0
- Information Education Projects: \$6,988
- Research Projects: \$42,743
- Total: \$49,731

Where should the unused stamp money go?

The Wild Turkey Advisory Committee makes the recommendation that the unused Wild Turkey Stamp funds get reallocated to the wildlife districts to fund unfunded or partially funded DNR turkey habitat projects.

Stamp Guideline Edits:

- The language about public lands is not specific enough – “some level of turkey hunting” is too vague
- The oak savanna management language should be clear about being no more than a ½ mile from an existing forest

Turkey Season Overview

Spring 2017 harvest is just about the same as last year. Periods A, C, and D have about the same harvest rates as last year. Period B is down about 2000 birds, most likely due to frequent rain throughout the hunting period. Period E is up about 1000 birds from last year. The youth hunt and learn to hunt events harvested about 550 more birds than last year.

Fall 2017 Permit Levels

There have been very few customers commenting on fall permit levels. Zone 5 levels were increased from 2015 to 2016. The committee agrees to increase Zone 6 and 7 levels to create a gradual transition to the elimination of the drawing in fall of 2018.

For every 100 permits issued, 5 hens are harvested in the fall. Increasing permit levels by a few hundred has minimal impact on the overall population.

Committee’s recommendation on fall 2017 permit levels:

Zone	Permits 2016	Proposed 2017
1	27,500	27,500
2	22,000	22,000
3	30,000	30,000
4	15,000	15,000
5	4,000	4,200
6	1,600	1,900
7	1,200	1,500

Public Comments

- Expand THAP to Marathon County since there are so many properties with damage tags
- Concerned that Wisconsin turkeys are not being managed scientifically and that the management zones are too large to properly manage the population
- There has been a lot of negative feedback from hunters about moving the season start date back to the 3rd week in April. Complaints include: scheduling conflicts because hunters did not realize it changed, bug problems in the later time periods, only having 2 weeks to hunt in state parks and trails.

- Turkey Stalking or Reaping – there has been an increase in popularity of turkey reaping, where hunters walk around carrying a turkey fan in front of them to cause toms to charge. It is a very effective way of hunting with high success rates, but is very dangerous when there are other hunters around (such as on public land). There was one fatality in Virginia recently using this method. The committee is concerned that it can have biological implications because of the increased rate of success. There is also an obvious safety concern. There have been no turkey hunting accidents this spring in Wisconsin.

Partner Updates

DNR WM: Chris Pollentier's harvest modelling project can be used to estimate gobbler harvest in zone 2 to see if we are close to reaching the 30% threshold of harvest. No progress has been made on the mast index project started by Scott.

WCC: Conservation Congress is working on switching spring hearings to an online voting system. There was a meeting with DNR and the project is going forward. There are concerns about who the participants will be now that it is online. Each person will have to create a go wild profile to vote which allows us to see what kind of licensing each voter has (how many people voting on trapping actually have trapping licenses?). Public meetings would still have to be held to elect delegates and hear citizen resolutions. This may only be a 1 to 2 year trial.

WWF: Seen an upswing in turkey population in zones 5,6 and 7. Many hunters were not happy with the earlier opening day. Is there any data on peak nest initiation? It would be interesting to see how it coincides with spring opener. We could maybe get nest initiation by back tracking from peak gobbling dates.

WSFS CNMF: Finishing up from last round. Field season is starting and there is water everywhere. There was probably nest loss due to the rain.

DNR LE: Realignment of DNR Law Enforcement is continuing to move forward.

NWTF: RCPP Grant looks good – have a good connection with NRCS which always helps when looking for money. There is 21,062 acres of projects with the DNR. Will be hiring an R³ Coordinator in the fall. Was on the deputy director interview panel and there were a lot of great candidates. Will be meeting with the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge for stewardship contracting to turn old pine plantations into savanna. Fun Story: participated in a mark-recapture study of ornate box turtles in Wisconsin and used turtle-sniffing dogs to find the turtles, it worked well.

DNR WM: It was a good LTH in Ozaukee County. There were 35 participants and 19 turkeys shot. Over half of the harvest happened in the afternoon.